

***Gaultheria hispidula*** (L. Muhl.)  
creeping snowberry  
Ericaceae (Heather Family)

**Status:** State Sensitive  
**Rank:** G5S2

**General Description:** A creeping, slender-stemmed perennial shrub with alternate, in-turned leaves less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  in (4 to 10 mm). The white flowers are four-lobed and grow singly in the leaf axils. The flowers are subtended by two prominent bracts. The aromatic berry is clear white and less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  in (3 to 5 mm) thick.

**Identification Tips:** Creeping snowberry is not a true snowberry (*Symphoricarpos*) but rather a *Gaultheria*, closely related to salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) and wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*). It can be distinguished from other species of *Gaultheria* by its four-lobed flowers (flowers of the other species are mostly five-lobed), its small leaves, and its white fruit.

**Phenology:** Identifiable May through June.

**Range:** The species occurs from Labrador west to British Columbia, south into northern Idaho and northeastern Washington. In Washington, it has been found in Pend Oreille and Snohomish counties.

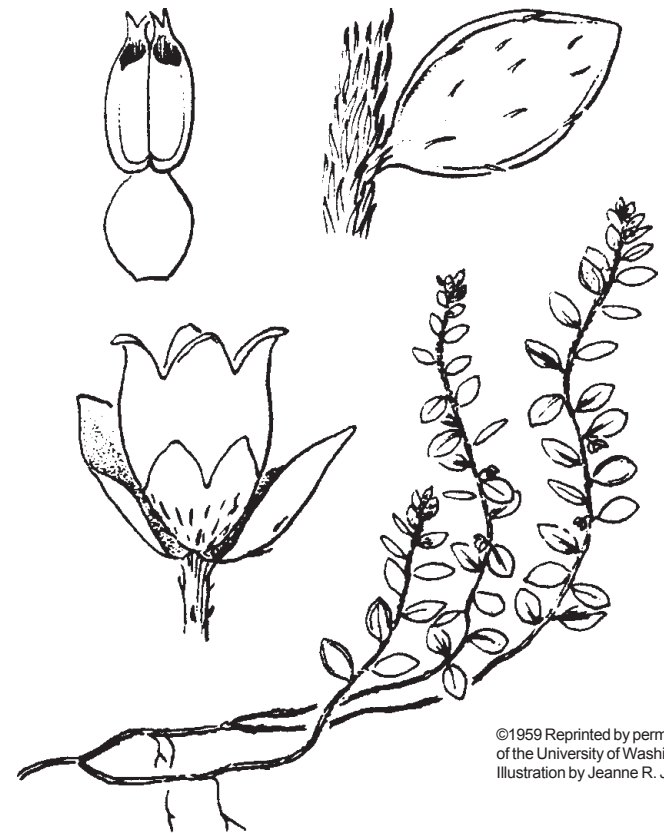
**Habitat:** This species occurs in sphagnum bogs and forests. Common associates include Alder (*Alnus* spp.), Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), bryum moss (*Bryum* spp.), starflower (*Trientalis* spp.), birch (*Betula* spp.), sedge (*Carex* spp.), and woodland horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*).

**Ecology:** *Gaultheria hispidula* occurs among areas of moist sphagnum and standing water in fir/spruce coniferous forests. It is frequently found growing in dense mats trailing over downed logs, stumps, and mossy patches.

**State Status Comments:** This species is known from eight recent occurrences in Pend Oreille County and one recent occurrence in Snohomish County.

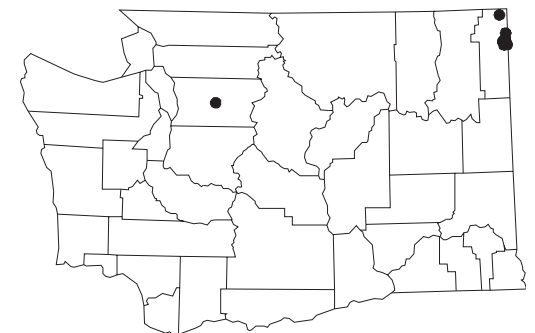
**Inventory Needs:** Known occurrences should be revisited. The development of a species management guide would be helpful.

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creeping snowberry



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Known distribution of  
*Gaultheria hispidula*  
in Washington



● Current (1980+)  
○ Historic (older than 1980)

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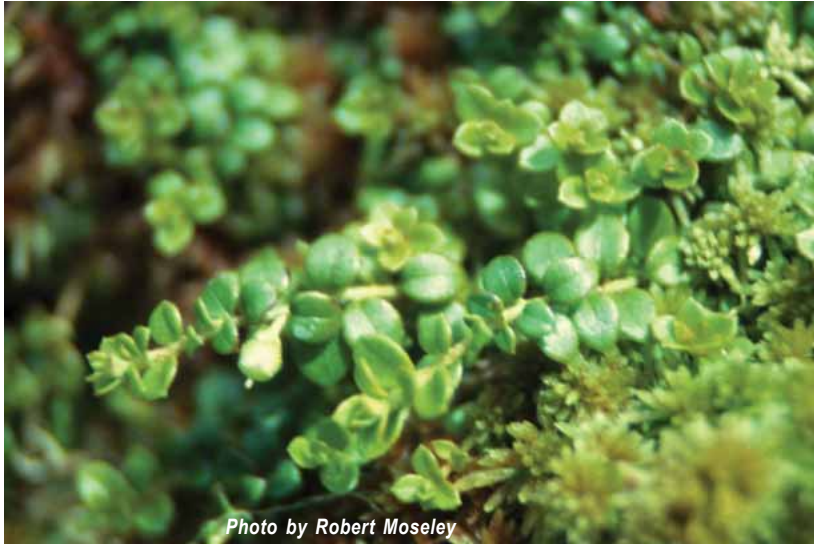


Photo by Robert Moseley

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**Threats and Management Concerns:** Presently, the greatest threat to the species may be timber harvest, creation of dikes, damming, and winter recreation. Beaver activity appears to periodically affect hydrology. Over-collection for horticultural purposes and road development are also potential threats.

**References:**

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, and J.W. Thompson. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest, Part 4:Ericaceae through Campanulaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 510 pp.

Washington Natural Heritage Program. 1981. *An Illustrated Guide to the Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive Vascular Plants of Washington*. Washington State Department of Natural Resources. 328 pp.



Photo by Steve Caicco